

MEMORANDUM FOR:

HAK (full title)

SUBJECT :

Notes on a Possible US
Game Plan

1. ~~Introduction~~ Posing over the matters we discussed in our 21 December telephone conversation ~~has~~ ~~been~~ ~~already~~
~~have~~ stimulated some thoughts ^{that are} outlined below for your consideration. These are personal views, not official ones. They get into matters far outside my (or the Agency's) official parish. Since I am currently on leave, please take them as the informal thoughts of a ~~fellow~~ ~~operative~~ ~~acting~~ private citizen who would like to help the President in any way he can. These thoughts are offered in a full ^{awariness} ~~awareness~~ ~~but~~ ~~not~~ ^{some} ~~of~~

2. Desiderata, it seems to me that there are ~~are~~ rough or embryonic, ~~few~~ ~~are~~ ~~startlingly~~
I also recognize that some of my suggestions may not be feasible for reasons of which I am ignorant or have not considered, some may relate to actions that are already in train, and some may have already been considered and rejected for good and sufficient reasons of which I am also unaware.

Desiderata

2. Desiderata. It seems to me that there are those things we need to accomplish, if possible, as soon as we can.

a. We need to get Hanoi off its wicket of stonewalling on the 20 October draft ~~and~~ ^{and attempting} to use that draft to torpedo our relations with the GVN and thus enormously improve Communist political prospects in South Vietnam.

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(Section) (1) I have given considerable thought to the concept we discussed of trying to pitch Hanoi with a purely military deal one that avoids the political thicket by ignoring all political questions. I may be suffering from a lack of imagination, but this seems to me to be a non-sense blind alley. Hanoi for one thing, Hanoi's primary interests are political, not military, hence it is hard to envisage Hanoi seriously entertaining, let alone buying, any such proposal. For another, given the Politburo's psychology it would be counterproductive for us to float any such proposal at this time. ^{Hanoi} They would react it as a sign of weakness demonstrating that we are prepared to give them a politically safe hand in return for our prisoners and an ~~extant~~ US disengagement. This, in turn, would probably serve to make the North Vietnamese even more intransigent.

→ INDENT

(2) The Politburo has endeavored to structure a situation where the process of negotiation and settlement of itself cripples the GVA -- by ~~the~~ poisoning our relations with Saigon -- and thus gives the communists a clear shot at victory ~~regardless of the terms~~. Our best counter would be to outplay Hanoi at its own situational game (where ~~we are~~ we have heads we really have much greater resources) by creating a situation in which continued stonewalling on Hanoi's part becomes even more disadvantageous than the hapless (to Hanoi) course of capitulating in S^t

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put under (a) 5. We need to get, and keep, the GVN
 ← in tandem with us.

(1) I know full well how exasperating, intransigent and downright unreasonable Thieu can be and apparently it's being. As I told you ~~Thursday~~
~~on 21 December~~, I have watched Thieu operate for more than a decade, rising in the process from a relatively obscure colonel to the most powerful and most effective political leader South Vietnam has ever had. ~~He and we both~~
need to realize, however, that I also recognize and certainly agree that, in the final analysis, US interests can never become hostage to the whim or veto of any foreign power or foreign leader. We may eventually (or soon) have to go it alone; but if we do, Hanoi will have achieved one of its highest ambitions, that of rupturing the bond between Saigon and Washington which has ~~so far~~ long served as a major obstacle to the achievement of Hanoi's ultimate objectives.

(2) Both we and the GVN need to remember, and remind each other, ~~of~~ how much it is in our mutual interests not to fall victim to Hanoi's ~~lure~~ ^{gambit}. I am ignorant of what oral or written views were exchanged during General Huynh's most recent Saigon visit and hence am ignorant of the current state of play in our dealings with Saigon. Nonetheless, I am still convinced that the only issue on which Thieu will not budge (because he is unshakably convinced, ~~not~~ he can not) budge is the ~~final~~ ^{not} signing or concurring in ^{any} formal agreement which has the net effect

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of erasing his government's legal status or
 claim on right to existence. If we can somehow
 devise a way of accommodating Thieu on this
 issue -- without sacrificing our interests in the
 process -- I think he can be brought around to
 a reasonably cooperative posture on all the other
 points of current contention.

(3) As we have discussed on several occasions,
 Thieu has always been difficult to deal with — He is
 a stubborn loner who has developed stonewalling
 to a fine art, partly because it is a tactic congenial
 to his nature and partly because it is a tactic that
 to date, has almost always been successful in getting
 him what he wants or feels he has to have.
 The best and most fruitful approach to Thieu —
 and the only one I have ever known to influence
 his behavior — is through his pragmatism. But anyone's
~~own~~
~~own conclusions~~
~~else's~~
~~conclusions~~ concerning his best interests are
 nugatory unless and until they become his
 conclusions. The technique that works with Thieu
 — and, again, the only one I have ever seen
 work — is the Socratic. In the course of
 non-polaric dialogue, you plant the conceptual
 seeds and stimulate the芽 of reasoning
 which Thieu then follows (with non-obtrusive
 guidance) until he reaches its logical
 conclusion. Telling him, in all sincerity,
 what you believe he ought to do or has to
 do does not work — or at least it
 never has worked in the past.

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Indirect

(A) Though the nature of his conversations with General Hung, and the content of his personal reply to the President may seem to belie this, there are two considerations which greatly influence

Thieu's ~~perception~~ political perception: (a) Privately, he is acutely aware of his ~~country~~ country's need for continued US support and backing. (b) He has the highest personal regard and admiration for President Nixon. ~~If this is indeed the case, one~~ Why then, one may understandably ask, is he being so intransigent and unreasonable -- if not (from our perspective) downright irrational -- in responding to US requests for cooperation, even personal requests from President Nixon? The answer, of course, is that from his perspective, Thieu does not think he is being unreasonable. Instead, he thinks we are being unreasonable. More importantly, he also thinks he has a much better, much more clear-eyed, and much more operational understanding of Vietnamese political reality, including Vietnamese psychology, than we do. ~~This attitude is reinforced by~~ a grim fixation on the fact that the ~~possible~~ adverse consequences of a settlement disastrous for non-Communist Vietnamese in South Vietnam will be borne and suffered by the latter, not by Americans living in comfort and safety ~~an ocean away~~.

P (S) We see Thieu ~~is~~ faced with a choice between cooperative compliance a politically fatal loss of US support and cooperative compliance, ~~which may~~ generate grave risks but in a course of action whose risks for him and his government -- which may be great -- can be attenuated and diminished by the continued US backing and protection such compliance (alone) will make possible. Thieu, however, sees it differently.

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He sees himself being driven toward a ~~bad~~ choice between two extremely unpalatable alternatives: a choice between ~~and~~ a rupture with Washington that will almost certainly prosaically prove politically fatal and acquiescence in a settlement that will inevitably result ~~in~~ that is tantamount to a death warrant for any non-Communist government in South Vietnam.

In his eyes, this is the choice between surrendering when you can see the "no quarter" flag flying or fighting on going down fighting even though your cause is prosaically hopeless. The latter is a ~~choice~~ choice. In his eyes, this is the choice between going down fighting even though your cause is prosaically hopeless ~~and surrendering~~ and surrendering when you can see the "no quarter" flag flying. ~~or for example's sake~~
Far to This, the latter To Thieu no matter how risky or unpalatable the former alternative may be, it is clearly the lesser evil.

(6) Our problem with Thieu ~~is~~ is thus a problem of communication rooted in differing perceptions of the Vietnam situation that produce two quite different sets of cost-benefit calculations.

It would seem to me that the solution to a communications problem has to lie in an improved communications. In Thieu's case, this is most likely to be achieved by a kind of Socratic dialogue (Plato's fundamental philosophical interest, after all, was ~~for~~ the problems of perception), a dialogue -- by Ambassadorial conversation, emissary visitation and written messages -- where ultimate, when or if they have to be conveyed, are relayed as informational data defining the givens in a problem to which two interdependent allies must somehow find a joint solution.

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c. We ought to develop our own draft
agreement -- with truly matching English and
Vietnamese texts -- embodying what we would consider
the schematic outline of a fair and reasonable
settlement while affording what we consider adequate
protection to interests or concerns we deem essential.

(1) This is not a proposal to start from
scratch with a blank piece of paper. I want you instead suggesting that we take the entire record
of the past several months -- including the Hanoi
language we feel we can accept, the changes we
have proposed or failed to propose, ^{plus} ~~and~~ any
other pertinent ideas we may have developed --
and mold them all into a clean draft
with an eye to insuring that future negotiating
sessions operate from OUR text(s). ~~Not~~ This
would get us permanently off the 20 October
wicket. It would also accomplish two other
useful things.

(2) First, if I have learned anything in
almost two decades of working in a bureaucracy
it is that regardless of the suspect under
consideration or nature of the group convened
to consider it, in any process of coordination
or negotiation the person (or party) who wrote
the draft from which everyone is working
has a tremendous advantage. He sets the
tone and terms of reference, ^{Furthermore,} ~~and~~ the mechanics
of group endeavor psychology somehow make it
easier to resist changes than to insist on their
incorporation.

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(3) Secondly, even if the substance and much of the language is virtually identical, the GVN will be much more comfortable (and cooperative) if the subsequent negotiations are based on our draft agreement, not Hanoi's.

3. A Possible Scenario: It seems to me that the above desiderata might be ~~achieved~~ realized, and a ~~non~~ negotiated settlement achieved, if we were to try a scenario roughly along the lines outlined below. Such a scenario could not be completed before Congress reconvenes on 3 January, but with a little luck it could be well launched by the President's inauguration on 20 January - certainly producing outward manifestations of potentially useful activity and possibly some promise of productive results.

If this suggested scenario has two integral components: One is a set of "pressure actions" designed to alter the overall situation in ways that make a negotiated settlement we would consider acceptable look increasingly to Hanoi like the least unpalatable alternative open to the politburo. The other is a game plan of sequential specific moves, to be played off against the continuing backdrop of the ongoing pressure actions.

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5. The Backdrop of Mounting Pressure. The proposed mix of pressure actions is designed to complicate Hanoi's current problems, undercut the Politburo's current position, and make continuation of the Politburo's current course of action an increasingly unattractive prospect.

6. The first component of the pressure mix would be relentless continuation of the bombing over all of North Vietnam, though perhaps with ~~strikes~~ somewhat less reliance on B-52s if the requisite targets could be hit as effectively and at less cost with other types of aircraft. The objective here would be not only logistic harassment but particularly, the exertion of political pressure by erasing of physical value the North Vietnamese have built -- power plants, factories, bridges, radio stations, etc. -- and implacably preventing any reconstruction. (Straight terror bombing of targets such as population centers, schools, hospitals and the like should be strictly eschewed -- on ~~pragmatic~~ pragmatic grounds as well as moral ones.) Where feasible, this bombing would be augmented by naval gunfire; and North Vietnam's ports would of course be kept closed by mining.

7. This "ordnance" effort would be augmented by an overall campaign along the lines of the project General Harg and I developed in September.* A key ingredient would be intensifying psychological warfare of all kinds (radio,

* See my draft "Pressure Policy," inputs of 29 September and 4 October.

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leaflets, perhaps airdropping the single shot pistols described in the September proposal, etc) targeting against the North Vietnamese population and the rank and file of both the Party and the Army.

We know the Politburo is hyper-sensitive to any form of pressure that has a potential for threatening Party discipline or the Party's control over the Army and the North Vietnamese people. Hanoi's manifest alarm and outrage over the psychological warfare efforts we have already mounted ~~sheets~~ demonstrates that to the Politburo, this is a very tender nerve. It is therefore a nerve we should press hard with all available resources. Serious ~~concentration~~ about reconsideration should be given to ploys or gambits previously ruled "off limits". For example, we know that photographs of President Nixon being feted by top Soviet and/or Chinese leaders have a devastating impact on NVA troops and Party cadre. Restrictions on the use of such photos (e.g. ~~ex~~ in leaflets) or other proscribed gambits may still be valid; but they should be subjected to careful review and not imposed by reflex first.

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Q. ~~to write~~ In South Vietnam, we ~~would~~ ^{should} ~~see~~
one again, but in conjunction with some ~~other~~
one again effort the GVN to use some
of that newly furnished ENHANCED PLUS hardware
in offensive activity targetted against NVA
units, ~~for~~ ideally augmenting any ~~the~~ ARVN
ground action with a perceptibly increasing
amount of VNAF activity to demonstrate
the friends the future will hold if a
reasonable settlement is ~~not~~ ^{soon} reached. Simultaneously,
and in conjunction with other actions approaches
to the GVN noted below, we should encourage
the GVN to press forward with the kind of
steps described in my 4 November checklist ~~checklist~~.
What we want, of course, is a projected image
of GVN activity, ~~as~~ initiative and (ideally)
progress in the military and the political arena.

9. Under this scenario, we would seek to undercut Hanoi by
~~the~~ ~~should~~ ~~the~~ immediately initiating
quiet (though, ~~as~~ of course, separate) overtures
to the Soviets and the Chinese, trying to
persuade them why ~~was~~ -- in each
case -- it was in our mutual, larger interest
for Moscow/Peking to, at a minimum, refrain
from publicly bashing Hanoi's stand ^{that} ~~that~~
that there is only one Vietnam and the
17th parallel is not even temporarily a de facto
international boundary. ~~If~~ If at all possible,
we would try to get at least one major
Communist power (both would of course be ideal)
to take the public position that ~~de facto~~
what was accepted as de facto current ^{political} reality
in Korea and Germany also ought to

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be accepted as de facto current political reality by Vietnam.

a. The approach to such an approach to the Soviets ought to be facilitated by the fact that we have now at least tacitly acknowledged ~~that~~ they ~ have ~ position with respect to Germany, hence they ought to be willing to ~~accept~~ acknowledge a parallel position ~ours~ with respect to Vietnam, a position they themselves sanctioned when they proposed ~~both~~ ~~Vietnam~~ that both Vietnam be admitted to the UN on January 1957.

b. The Taiwan factor might complicate any such overture to Peking, but ~~the Chinese~~ have never in concluding their foreign policy the Chinese Communists have never let ~~them selves~~ themselves be hindered by the hubris or foolish consistency. The Chinese (more than the Soviets) have certainly endorsed Kim II Sung's "sov. politik" and might be willing to acknowledge a Vietnam parallelism in the interest of trying other fish deemed of greater importance in Peking. ~~Communist or not, a unified Vietnam on China's southern border~~ ~~whether it would ever a fit target area~~
 It might never openly admit this to us, but Peking ~~can not~~ is certainly aware that, ~~a unified~~ whether Communist or not, a unified Vietnam on China's southern border ~~that~~ could ~~develop~~ clauses of gravitas and get a trifle big for us Britches.

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10. The Sequential Game Plan. Against the backdrop of the ~~action~~ pressure actions just described, a sequential game plan might unfold roughly as follows:

a. Within the next few days, we postface and keep open -- a standing invitation to Hanoi to resume private talks whenever the North Vietnamese are ready to resume serious negotiations.

b. We prepare, as quickly as possible, our consolidated agreement draft -- with Matching English and Vietnamese texts -- as described above. This draft should embody what we consider fair and acceptable proposals affording essential protection to US interests (e.g. prisoner return), reasonable protection to legitimate GVN interests (including language fault, at a minimum, eliminating any North Vietnamese right to send or station NVA troops in the South), and establishing a meaningful inspection/supervision system.

c. We quietly take that draft to Saigon and go over it with the GVN. We allow some give and take, being particularly receptive to their suggestions for modifications in the Vietnamese text to make as close a match as possible to the tone and substantive content of the English text. Nonetheless, we stick firmly to the line -- ostensibly "advisory" and not explicitly

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threatening -- that with Congress reconvening
and obviously restrictive, if the Party
Vietnamise show themselves willing
to buy such a package, the US Government
will ~~six~~ have no option but to sign
it promptly.

a. Either alone or in concert with
the GVN (particularly if the latter has
cooperatively concurred), we add some additional
language to or make a few modifications
in the agreed "minimum position" draft to
facilitate horse trading with the North Vietnamese,
by giving us a few throw-away counters to
bargain with.

c. If we and the GVN are still in
tandem, a face-to-face meeting between
President Nixon and President Thieu is to be
held in Guam or Honolulu (but at least
as far west as San Clemente). This
meeting produces -- and it is not held unless
Thieu has previously agreed that it's going
to produce -- a joint public reaffirmation
of our mutual abhorrence of war and
the suffering it entails and our joint
determination to seek a fair negotiated
settlement at the earliest possible time
by all possible means.

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f. We turn open an all-out, all-channel effort -- some channels being public, most private, with the latter including, if possible, the Soviets and/or the Chinese -- to get Hanoi back to some forum, in Paris or elsewhere, permitting direct, top-level dialogue.

g. In that dialogue, we are personally civil but substantively tough. We take the line that we are not willing to engage in further charades over Hanoi's performance last fall but left us skeptical of any profession of North Vietnamese good will or "serious intent". The options before us both are simple: continuation of the other, current situation for at least four more years, which is in no one's interest, or serious discussions and negotiations based on our draft.

II. Conclusion. The above game plan may be unrealistic and/or unworkable. Many of its components have been discussed before, some tried and some perhaps rejected for good reasons. In any event, essaying some such sequential plan would be less frustrating than sitting tight and leaving the initiative with Hanoi while political pressures mount on us here at home. (As explained in my 21 December Memorandum on Hanoi's game and game plan, Hanoi's next move will have to be decided by the Politburo, which is a committee -- and

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up tupper mounds.) I offer these thoughts
in the hope that they may be of some
use -- even that of ~~improving~~ ~~their~~ stimulating
a regeneration process that produces better ones.

G A C.